DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 401 391 CE 072 875

TITLE	Something Old, Something New: Rewarding Ventures for FE.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Development Agency, London (England).
REPORT NO	ISBN-1-85338-432-1
PUB DATE	96
NOTE	49p.; Photographs may not reproduce clearly.
AVAILABLE FROM	Further Education Development Agency, Publications Dept., Mendip Centre, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG, England, United Kingdom (9.50 British pounds).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
JOURNAL CIT	Innovations in FE; n3 Aut 1996
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; Corporate Support; Educational Finance; *Food Service; Foreign Countries; *Partnerships in Education; Postsecondary Education; *School Business Relationship; *Shared Resources and Services; *Technical Institutes; Technology Education; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	*England

ABSTRACT

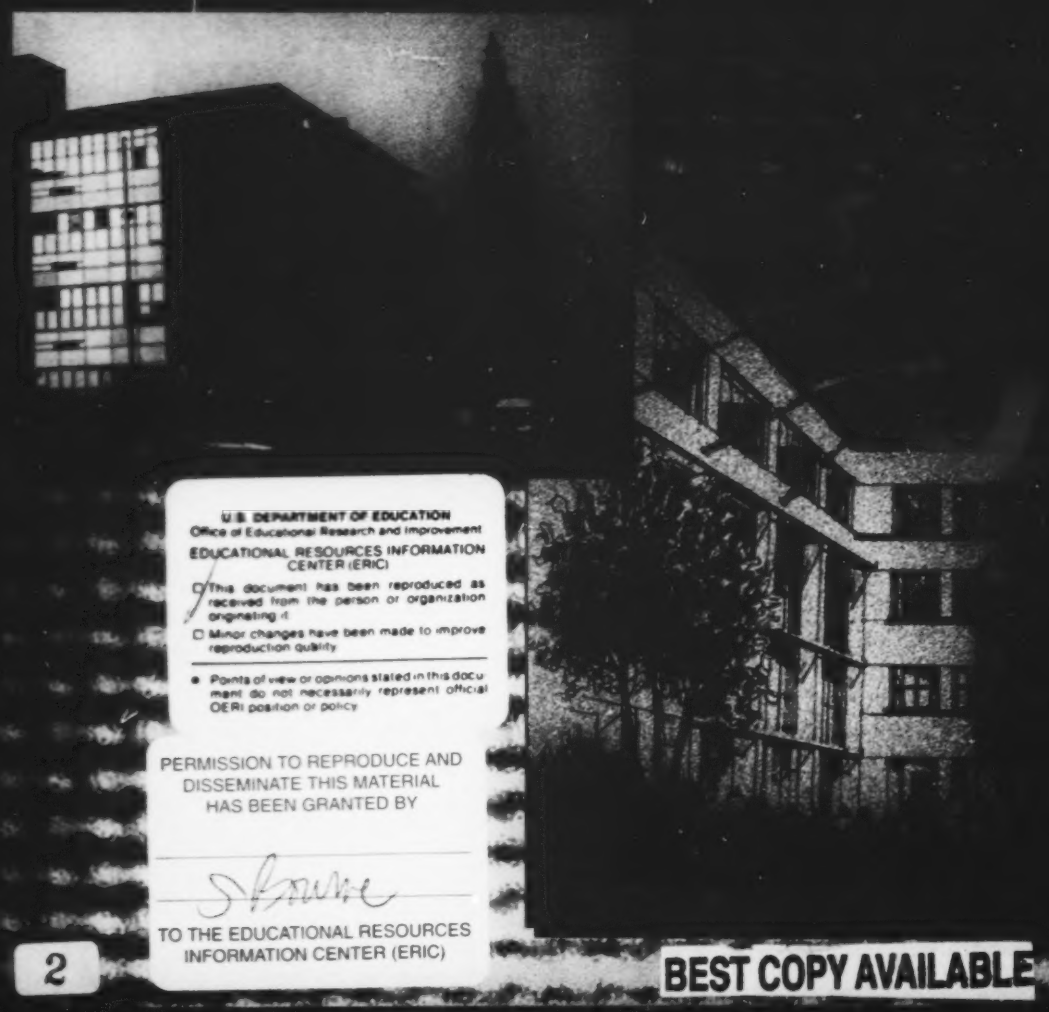
This booklet examines the partnerships that two British further education (FE) colleges have formed with private-sector firms since the incorporation of FE colleges in April 1993. Described first is the partnership arrangement between Guildford College and a private-sector catering firm that began with sharing of the costs of renovating and refurbishing the college canteen and that has since allowed both partners to share the profits from the catering firm's supplying students with the types of food the students actually want. The second half of the booklet discusses the partnership between St. Helens College and the pharmaceutical firm SmithKline, which donated an unwanted manufacturing complex consisting of a factory, landmark building, and parking lot to St. Helens. The college is working to convert the complex into a technology center by doing the following: converting the landmark building into offices; adapting the factory units to incorporate the college's schools of art, media, and design; establishing a research and development wing to develop a transfer technology center; establishing an open learning/resource center; relocating the student refectory and social areas; and developing information technology to provide videoconferencing, a cyber cafe, and Internet access. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 401 391

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

Something old, something *new*:
REWARDING VENTURES FOR FE



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Shawe

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CE072875

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Innovations in FE

Autumn 199

Innovations in FE

Cover Pictures:

Upper left: *SmithKline Beecham Factory*

Lower right: *Architect's Drawing to Show SKB Development*

CONTENTS

Foreword 3
Ernest Theodossin
FEDA Education Staff

From canteen into food hall 6
Ernest Theodossin
FEDA Education Staff

Student food enters the 1990s 6

Partnerships for success 15
Pat Bacon
Deputy Chief Executive,
St Helens College

Introduction to St Helens 15

St Helens College 16

The college's mission 17

The technology centre 18

SmithKline Beecham project 19

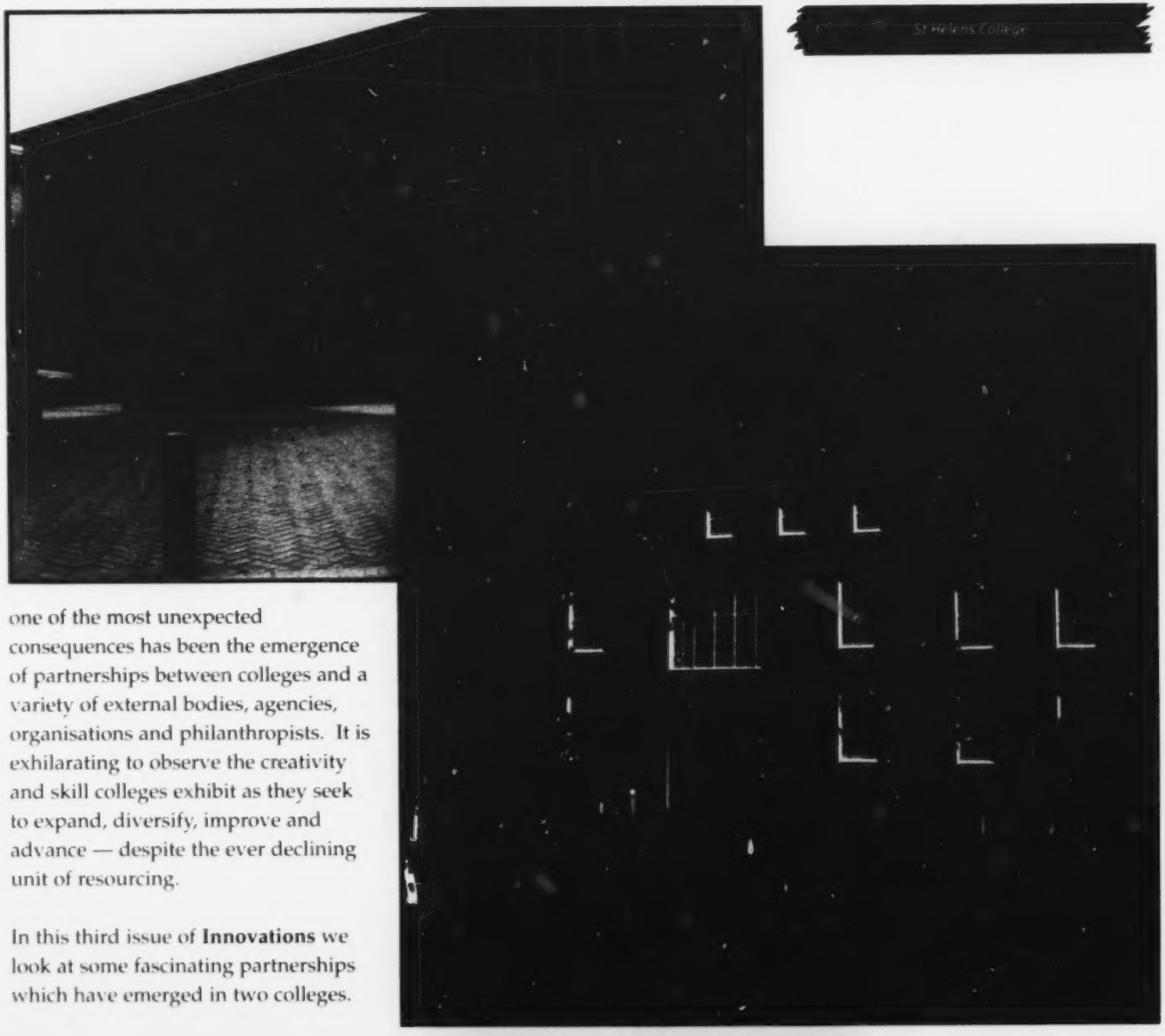
Partnerships for success 22

Foreword

Ernest Theodossin
FEDA Education Staff

Those who thought that incorporation was going to lead further education (FE) colleges towards self-determination must have had pause for quite a long thought since April 1993. Any college manager who was looking forward to 'going it alone' must surely have recognised long ago that others are sharing the journey. Behind the scenes and away from the unending supply of circulars, 'the world's largest LEA' is a familiar epithet for the Further Education Funding Council. It has been called ubiquitous and professionally parsimonious; if not actually blatantly interventionist at least unduly constraining. He who pays the piper...

That is undoubtedly the down side. If one takes a more positive approach, it is also apparent that there are benefits from incorporation. One of them is a growing recognition that there are some advantages to not going it alone:



one of the most unexpected consequences has been the emergence of partnerships between colleges and a variety of external bodies, agencies, organisations and philanthropists. It is exhilarating to observe the creativity and skill colleges exhibit as they seek to expand, diversify, improve and advance — despite the ever declining unit of resourcing.

In this third issue of **Innovations** we look at some fascinating partnerships which have emerged in two colleges.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Guildford's is perhaps the more straightforward, a business arrangement with a private-sector catering firm in which the partners have shared the costs of renovating and refurbishing the college canteen and have subsequently shared the profits from supplying the students with food.

The results are light years away from subsidised local authority dining, i.e. not particularly cheap, and seldom what nutritionists dream about for us, but they are certainly closer than traditional FE canteens were ever able to come to supplying what most students actually want. For many people youth is not a stage where the refinements of the table dominate life, and there are clear arguments for supplying college users with what they would choose given a chance.

Guildford is of course a fairly prosperous part of the country and the college is surrounded by a variety of alternative food suppliers, so while finance is a concern for some it is not necessarily a major constraint for others. At the same time, if the college did not deliver what students prefer, local competitors most certainly would. If one cannot claim that Guildford's Food Hall is a major recruiting tool, for some potential students it is clearly a plus when they are making the Big Choice at 16-plus.

What the Guildford partnership makes clear is that without the private sector the college would have been hard pressed to find the cash required to transform its dining quarters. With day-to-day management contracted out to a private supplier, the college managers are also freed of at least one area of direct responsibility amidst the growing mountain of managerial concerns. It is difficult not to conclude that while the arrangement may disappoint some, it also pleases many more.

St Helens is a very different college, located in the relatively less affluent North West of England. The partnerships here have been more varied and possibly driven by an even more urgent necessity. European money has proved beneficial, an advantage to EU membership which Euro-sceptics tend to ignore, possibly because few hail from economically depressed regions of the country.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The resulting Technology Centre was brought into being at a cost of £20m. It actually originated in a college-local authority vision dating from 1985. It has been erected in stages and houses not only the college but Business Link, the local TEC (newly merged with the Chamber of Commerce), a Business Education partnership and a number of business units, as well as conference facilities.

Perhaps the most spectacular of the St Helens' partnerships — and certainly the most visible within the town — derives from the generosity of a pharmaceutical firm, SmithKline Beecham, which announced in 1994 that it was to close its St Helens manufacturing site, fortuitously placed across the road from the main college building. The SmithKline Beecham complex includes a factory, an elegantly appointed listed building (ideal for management training courses) and car parking — all of it located in the centre of the town and now generously donated to the college. The SmithKline Beecham complex will house a variety of college activities.

Unlike the technology centre, which has involved long-term planning and development, the SmithKline Beecham opportunity seems to have been a example of impulse giving. Its existence owes a great deal to those college staff who were able to put together proposals within a matter of days and convince the firm that the results would serve a community facility, offer some visible compensation to the town's redundant workers, and establish a permanent memorial to the long association between the town of St Helens and the Beecham family. The modifications will be paid for mainly by some borrowing, by the use of the college's Hunter allocation and European funding.

In retrospect both the partnerships and the resulting provision in Guildford and St Helens seem almost obvious, but one needs to remember that creativity and imagination were needed, as well as requisite management skills in identifying and accessing opportunities and in negotiating effectively with external partners. Such arrangements are, of course, absolutely appropriate for FE colleges, whose history is founded on vocational work and whose overall mission involves building bridges between individuals and the world of work. The St Helens development programme and Guildford's Food Hall show colleges creating strong links with the surrounding communities. They also demonstrate that new and exciting opportunities are being created by FE post-incorporation.

From Canteen into Food Hall

Ernest Theodossin
FEDA Education Staff

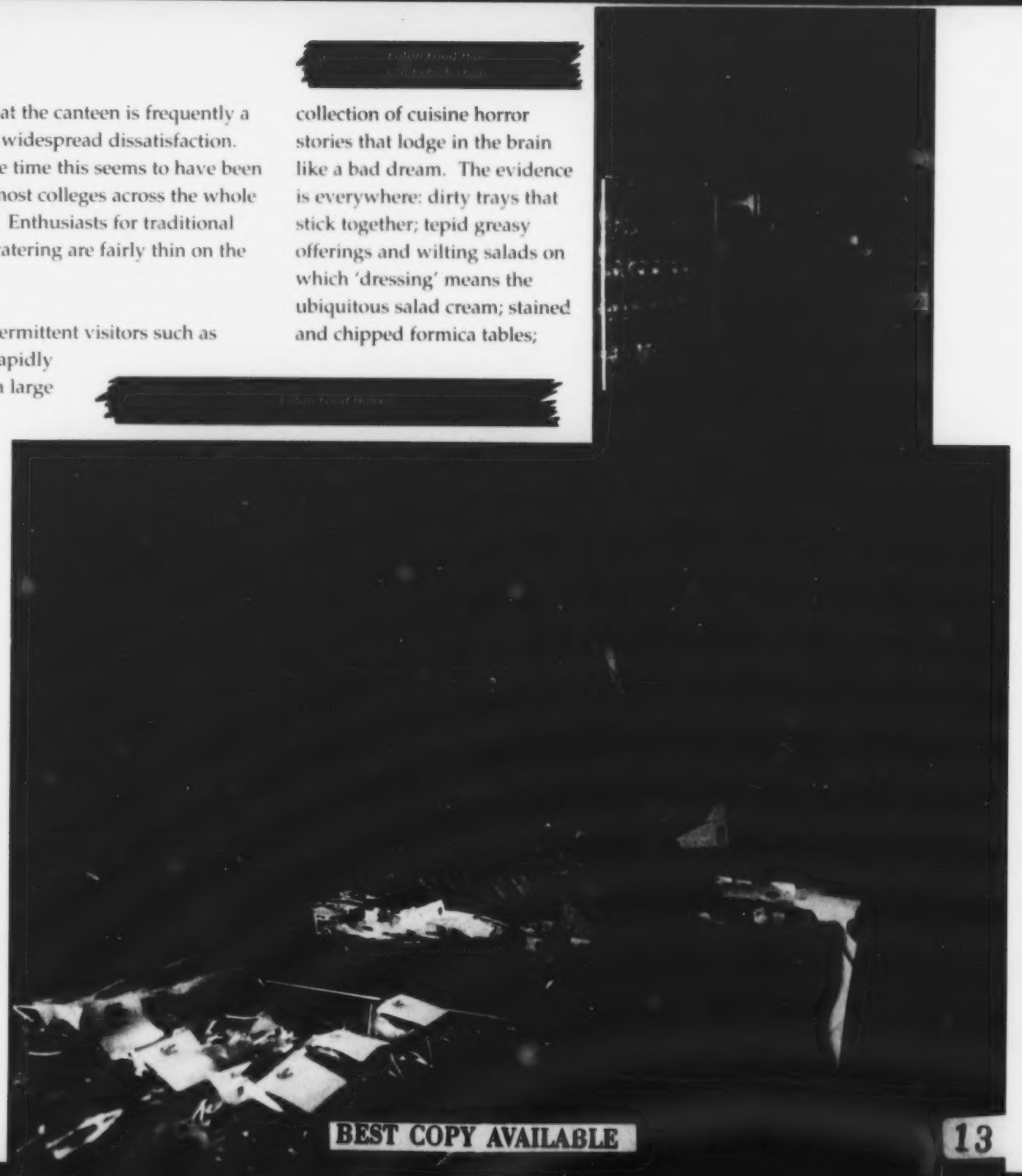
Student Food Enters the 1990s

Those of us who have surveyed FE students about their perceptions of colleges will know that the canteen is frequently a focus of widespread dissatisfaction. For some time this seems to have been true in most colleges across the whole country. Enthusiasts for traditional college catering are fairly thin on the ground.

Even intermittent visitors such as myself rapidly acquire a large collection of cuisine horror stories that lodge in the brain like a bad dream. The evidence is everywhere: dirty trays that stick together; tepid greasy offerings and wilting salads on which 'dressing' means the ubiquitous salad cream; stained and chipped formica tables;

Gill Anstiss
Guildford College's Chief Executive Officer

12



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

broken chairs; litter on the floors; untrained and poorly paid staff; cutlery with bits of dried food.

When the FE college also runs catering courses and a training restaurant, the contrast between the world of silver service (with predominantly working-class youngsters having to learn the French names for food) and the canteen is fraught with ironies. 'Compare and contrast the college canteen with the college restaurant' might make a fascinating essay question.

Moreover the typical college canteen occupies a kind of time warp, transporting us back to the early years of post-War Britain when the exhaustions and deprivations of the Great Struggle, rationing and the relative rarity of overseas travel combined to stimulate a mixture of stoicism and whingeing in the face of unappetising offerings. Thus was born the Continental conviction that the British are a race which eats from necessity rather than for pleasure.

There are, of course, explanations. Effective transformation of college canteens would require substantial investment in the plant and equipment, a high level of professional catering management, improved food and a determination to move from local authority 'dinner ladies' and school meals into the contemporary world of high quality catering. That requires money, effort and time.

One appreciates the constraints. FE colleges have always been at the poor end of the education pecking order. Incorporation has given them some freedoms but also inflicted upon them painful preoccupations with declining units of funding, new contracts, the ever-present need for increased recruitment, 'downsizing', enforced redundancies—in short, how to make less and less money go further and further. In such a world spending on the canteen must seem like the ultimate in decadent extravagance, like good quality caviar in the doss house or real champagne for the beggars who litter our city streets. Surely there must be more useful ways of spending what little money is available.

Alternatively, if we accept that 'the student experience' is not confined to the classroom but encompasses the college reception area, the library and

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

open learning centre, the computer suite, the toilets, car parking and the state of the floors over which they walk, then the canteen must also be a part of it. Eating is essential and inevitable. Breaking bread is also an ancient social ceremony in which hosts honour and welcome guests. Troughs are reserved for farm animals. Feeding human beings badly in shoddy surroundings does no credit to anyone and is hardly a desirable educational goal.

The most interesting feature of student dining at Guildford College is that the management have confronted the traditional problem and produced a solution which manages to satisfy the students while simultaneously generating additional income for the college.

Instead of attempting to preserve or improve the old arrangements, the college has joined forces with a private-sector contract catering firm, Eaton Management, to produce a shared solution to a traditional

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

problem. The result is both simple and unexpected.

Guildford started out with a fairly conventional catering arrangement. Post incorporation the college transferred the contract from the local authority to a private provider, Sutcliffe, but the results from a customer perspective were much the same. From the college management point of view they were also unsatisfactory. Sutcliffe wanted all catering contracts in the college, including the curriculum area. For a while there was the threat of court action.

What the college management wanted, according to Gill Anslow, the principal, was a unified concept surrounding food as a symbol. That required a single status, high quality facility offering a variety of styles, an approach that was modern and forward looking. It also meant that the result was to avoid feeling like a school or a traditional college. Food had to be available when students wanted it.

The original surroundings were 'grotty'. Many staff and older students ate elsewhere. Students aged 16-18 would frequently queue for up to 40 minutes.

The transformation involved a partnership between the college and Eaton Management, a private sector catering firm. It also required a shared investment of £270,000, with each partner paying half. The arrangement rests on a seven-year contract which is breakable on default.

The sequence involved the college briefing Eaton in January 1993 via proposals intended to maximise profitability in the refectory and associated catering operations (of which see below). In February Eaton presented an initial proposal to re-equip and refit the refectory and assume the management of all the college's catering activities. In the following month Eaton was appointed and a steering committee comprising management from Guildford and Eaton was set up to oversee the project. An on-site catering manager was appointed.

In May Eaton's competitive tender to undertake construction work in the refectory was submitted and accepted. In July, while the college was closed, work on the refectory began. In September 1993 the new enterprise was open for business following a period of staff training.

What the college obtained were new kitchens and servery installed to facilitate smooth workflow and provide maximum point of sale. A T-bar layout ensures fast service from up to four tills. One line serves burgers and another serves traditional dishes. This layout allows staffing involving two to 14 people to cope with demand peaks and troughs.

In one corner of this area is a new shop with state-of-the-art merchandising selling sandwiches, salads, fruit, chocolate, coffee, tea and soft drinks.

New colour co-ordinated seating areas make the refectory an attractive location to meet, eat and socialise. At the same time, TV points with satellite, land and video links provide a lively, bright atmosphere and offer opportunities for advertising and entertainment revenue.

The result is hardly startling to anyone who has traversed Britain's high streets, but it is certainly innovatory to the point of sensationalism to anyone anticipating the tack and tat of the traditional FE college canteen. The term 'food hall' conveys perfectly the atmosphere of fast food, rapid turnover, clean, functional surroundings and a service designed to attract young people in a hurry, i.e. not very far away from McDonald's and all that implies: consistency, efficiency, speed and popularity. There is also a brasserie, Vincent's, and a bar: in both the atmosphere is different and, if some distance away from *haute cuisine*, the emphasis is on dining and drinking for busy people who want more than fast food but lack the time to linger over individually prepared meals.

Inevitably not everyone has greeted the changes with approbation. One would expect that what is designed to suit students aged 16-19 would not necessarily please all lecturers. Some staff were disapproving when changes originally emerged, according to Gill Anslow. Not everyone wanted to eat with students. The food was more expensive. Others felt that it was cruel to get rid of 'the old grannies' who served local authority cuisine. Not all members of staff were agreeable to

eating from the 'cardboard and plastic' which are used in the Food Hall.

By way of compensation, the college made the old board room — one of the most attractive traditional rooms in Guildford — available to staff. There the old guard can choose from baguettes, sandwiches and salads.

For the new arrangements the college canvassed students and 'decided to give the punters what they want'. There is after all a Burger King across the road, so if the college does not supply its captive market there is nothing to prevent students from crossing the road. Some people are obviously keen to promote healthy food, but the demand is limited.

The new arrangements make money, which the old ones did not.

The college management also took a decision not to have a students' union bar but instead to go for a staff and student social bar. The presence of staff is a 'controlling feature'. Having a place for 'grown ups' ensures that minimum standards are maintained. The bar is run under club licence. Membership is restricted to those aged at least 18 and profits can be spent only for the benefit of club members. Club profits are taken from beverages only. Food is supplied by Eaton Management.

These facilities are popular. With a population of about 3,000 students and 500 staff (including support staff), the college management is convinced that virtually all students use the Food Hall, which is never empty. During term time the Food Hall is visited by more than 3,500 people per day and they pay about 70 to 80 pence on average. About 60% of the business is in sandwiches which are sold in the shop. Probably something like 50 staff use the bar each day. The club has a total membership of about 800 staff and students.

The catering facilities have diverse opening hours. The Food Hall serves from 08.00 to 19.00 on weekdays only, but closes at 17.00 on Fridays to 'clear down'. Its popularity is such that it could profitably stay open longer. Vincent's Bar, encompassing the brasserie, serves food from 12.00 to 14.00 and opens from 17.00 to 23.00 on weekdays and on Saturdays from 19.00 to 24.00, when it serves mainly students. One staff member regards it as offering a 'pleasant atmosphere' and being 'very cheap'.

When it comes to financial matters, college staff are perhaps understandably reticent about disclosing details: for example they pay Eaton a management fee. There is a feeling however that they benefit from economies of scale since Eaton have the negotiating advantages of being a major purchaser.

One needs to remember that while the training restaurant is curriculum based, the Food Hall and Vincent's Bar are commercially based. According to Peter Johnson, the Enterprise Manager and ex-Head of Hospitality and Food Studies, Eaton has been contracted to go into partnership to run the restaurant. A manager is there to market the venture and to ensure opening at non-timetabled times, but lecturers are thus freed to lecture. The college concentrates on training and assessment. As a result turnover has tripled in two years.

Eaton assists during timetabled sessions. Outside these limits Eaton is required to employ students and college staff 'at commercial rates', i.e. at a lower level than lecturers would normally attain. Only if the latter are not available will Eaton use its own staff. This venture is not yet financially profitable, but when it takes off Eaton will want its share of the profits.

If Food Hall prices are approximately ten per cent lower than in the High Street, it is also important to note that the college enterprises pay no VAT, so there is a clear advantage when it comes to income generation — at least from the Eaton/college perspective.

What are the actual prices like? Sandwiches vary: prawn and mayonnaise and roast chicken and salad are each £1.30; bacon, lettuce and tomato, tuna with sweet corn and Edam cheese with salad £1.15 each. Similarly with drinks: mineral water and fruit juice sell for 50p; Ribena and Lucozade for 45p; coffee, Pepsi and hot chocolate for 40p; tea for 35p. Cheeseburgers are available for £1.60.

If one talks to students the judgements are inevitably varied and the recollections of prices not always accurate.

Vincent's Bar menu board

Helen Dean, a second-year student, uses the Food Hall as a meeting place. The sandwiches she considers reasonably priced, but the price for burgers is 'not reasonable'. Soft drinks cost 35p, 5p more than in the shop. Tea is also 35p. Over all she calculates that she spends £2 to £3 per day in the Food Hall, and £10 to £15 per week.

Like Helen, Sonia Gehnan lives at home and travels to college by her own car but spends £3 to £4 a day in the Food Hall; unlike her, Sonia feels that the Food Hall offers good value for money. For example a jacket potato would cost £1.40 in the college but more like £3 outside. She also insists that cokes are not cheaper outside. She seldom brings her own lunch because of the inconvenience.

Sonia came to the college because it did the course she wanted. Although she had heard that the food at Guildford was better than at other colleges, that made no difference to her. Her main complaint is that as a vegetarian she finds very limited choice in the college.

Andrew Spencer, a first-year student, also lives at home but travels to college by bus. He spends £5 a day on food (£20 per week to cover the four days he attends). The Food Hall played a part in helping him to choose the college and to avoid doing his GCSEs at school where the food is 'not very good'.

Lee Everett is a second-year HND student who rents a house with three other lads for an 'extortionate' £200 per month. He walks the two miles to college each day. He uses the Food Hall to socialise but considers the burgers and chips 'not good value', particularly as he needs to remain within his budget of £1.50 to £2 per day.

Lee has a fairly comprehensive overview of alternative food venues. He considers McDonalds and Burger King more expensive than the Food Hall. He has used the brasserie and rates it as 'brilliant' because one can get a main meal for £2.50 and a jacket potato for £1.50 — all in 'large

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

portions'. The bar, on the other hand, is 'more for staff' and the Food Hall suitable 'for snacks'.

In the Food Hall I talked with a group of four HE students doing the foundation year of an undergraduate course franchised from the University of Surrey. One considered the offerings 'junk food' and expensive, for which reason she brings sandwiches. She visits the Hall because the coffee is good and there is no other place to meet. She had been at Guildford three years before, when she could obtain 'better and cheaper meals' at the college.

A second member of this group feels that students 'ought to be taught to eat more nutritional food. Managers think students want burgers and sandwiches, but that's all they get to eat. I try to tell the manager otherwise'. A third notes somewhat disparagingly that it's 'like being in a McDonald's'. A fourth student has not joined the bar club because '£1 per pint of beer is too much of a temptation. In a pub it's likely to be £2.00 and no problem to resist'.

The Food Hall is staffed by a small hardcore management team and people who want to do time slots. The timetable is planned for the following week only. The college could hire students but its policy is not to employ from within. If they come from other colleges that's fine. Otherwise it employs housewives, people who want to do minimal hours per week. Eaton decides the wages, sets the budget and targets.

As far as training goes, the work involves a series of jobs which are broken down into tasks, almost like a production line procedure. Staff can be trained in two hours from the time they walk in from the street.

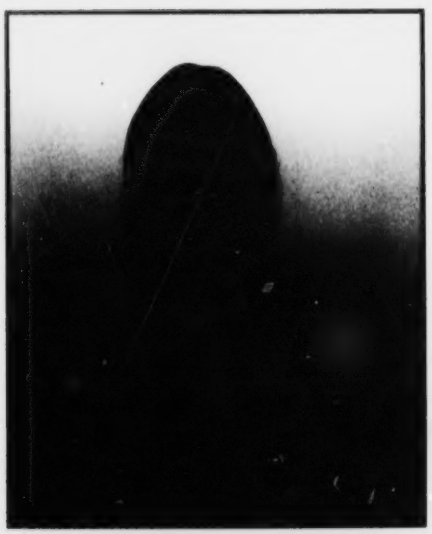
Prices are about ten per cent lower than in the High Street, enough to discourage potential on-site customers from looking elsewhere but high enough to ensure profitability. Eaton's franchise does not extend to the training restaurant, where management is responsible for sales, marketing and lecturer support. The college employs an outside contractor who can accredit NVQ student learning in the restaurant.

From a management perspective the arrangement works for both Eaton and Guildford. The latter might do better commercially if it ran its own provision. It might do better ideologically if it reduced the profit margin to aid the students but there would be losses as well as gains. Eaton are clearly making money (they could not otherwise stay in business) but they are also freeing the Guildford management from the demands of catering provision, leaving them free to devote more of their time and energies to educational concerns, and at the same time providing profit sharing. In the current FE world where managers are sufficiently stressed with day-to-day problems and the difficulties involved in growing on a declining unit funding standard, putting out the catering to a private-sector partner has many attractions.

From the customer perspective as well, one is likely to conclude that there are advantages and disadvantages to the arrangement. The Food Hall and brasserie clearly suit a large proportion of the Guildford population, even if some of them use the facilities because they consider them convenient rather than excellent. Others are obviously delighted. Of its kind, this provision is clean, slick and modern, intended for people moving fast and on the trot. At the very least it offers high professional standards within a specialised niche market, a pricing structure that is fair and an atmosphere that is undoubtedly more suited to the 1990s incorporated college than the inherited tat of yesteryear. And it makes a profit.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUCCESS

Pat Bacon
Deputy Chief Executive
St Helens College



Pat Bacon
Deputy Chief Executive

Introduction to St Helens

St Helens is a metropolitan borough council (MBC), about 12 miles from Liverpool and 20 from Manchester. In 1986 St Helens MBC took the far sighted decision to merge the three colleges of St Helens and Newton-le-Willows (both FE colleges) and the School of Art in St Helens.The result was one of the largest colleges in England, dwarfed only by the 1990s mergers of colleges in large cities such as Liverpool and Sheffield.

When post-16 institutions were taken out of local authority control and given incorporated status on 1 April 1993, St Helens had two FE colleges, a Catholic sixth-form college (Carmel) as well as the larger FE institution.

In addition to the 1986 merger, further education in St Helens was undergoing radical change. Since the town was founded on the mining industry, it was not surprising that St Helens College had a mining centre; nor was it unexpected that when the last pit closed two years ago, the last of the mining engineers retired from the college. The town had celebrated 450 years of mining in the early 1990s.

By way of lasting memorial, when the college was incorporated engineering students made a large-scale mining lamp, which was presented to the authority as a tribute to their commitment to the college.

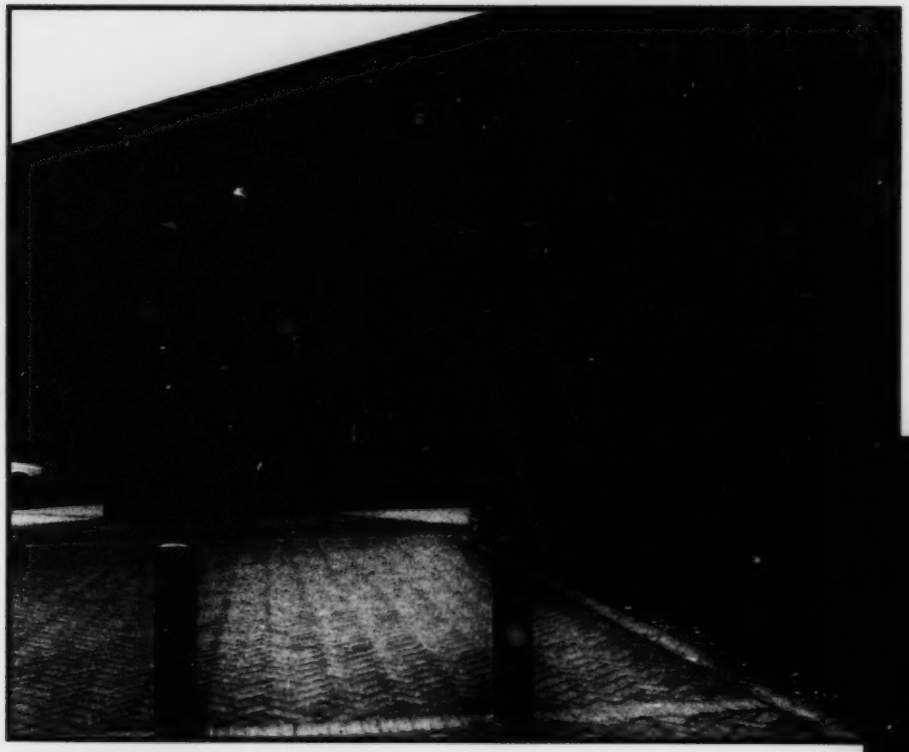
St Helens has also developed as a glass-making town, meaning that the college has enjoyed a close working relationship with Pilkingtons, including the development of open learning modules in glass technology. Reductions in the work force, and particularly in recruitment, have changed the nature of that relationship. Instead of traditional training of apprentices and other employees, the two organisations rub shoulders through membership of a number of key local organisations:

- the Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), re-organised and renamed from 1 January 1996 as St Helens Chamber of Commerce, Training and Enterprise
- St Helens First, which is focused on the economic regeneration of the borough
- the Education Business Partnership concerned with enhancing the links between industry and education

The other main industrial component of the borough was the pharmaceutical industry, in the form of Beechams. The Beecham family opened a factory in St Helens over 100 years ago producing, amongst other products, their world famous Beechams pills. The company later became SmithKline Beecham but due to economic constraints the St Helens factory was shut down in 1995.

Joe West (Executive Chief Executive)
Bill Walker (Deputy Chief Executive)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



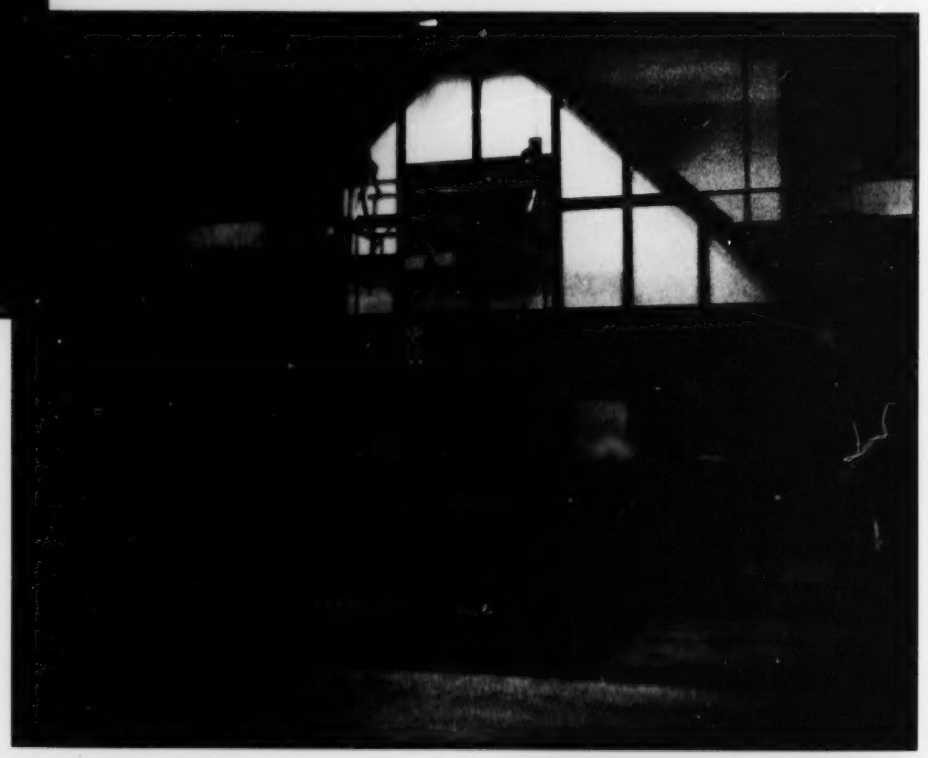
Technology Centre phase 1

St Helens College

In 1996 the college is celebrating its centenary. I arrived there six years ago and have seen dramatic changes during my time as the college has coped with the adverse swings in economic fortune for the borough and the reshaping of the industrial climate of St Helens. Consequently there have also been major changes to the curriculum in terms of the provision, client groups and delivery methods. Incorporation itself and a full inspection by the Further Education Funding Council during 1993-4 have brought further changes. Inevitably the college's buildings have been adapted considerably as part of the strategy for managing change.

The word that is central to the college's approach to its environment is 'partnership'. It is fitting to that vision that, until the summer of 1995, the School of Art part occupied the Gamble Building, named after the family which donated the building to the town for educational use.

At the time of the 1986 merger, the college was operating on a total of 21 sites. College management was aware of the problems and inefficiencies that multi-site operation created, particularly the difficulties of forging a corporate identity for unwilling merger partners. Any reduction in sites



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

needed to be carefully planned to ensure space for growth and adequate community provision. In the seven years leading up to incorporation, the college withdrew from 14 sites. The newly incorporated college's first estates strategy in 1993 identified a preferred model of a three-site operation: Brook Street (a 40-year-old traditional concrete framed structure); Newton-le-Willows (a 75-year-old traditional timber framed structure); and the Technology Centre (brand new, part built).

The College's mission

The mission statement remains unchanged since incorporation. Our purpose is to be a college centred on St Helens with a wider regional role in both further and higher education, and to provide an accessible and comprehensive range of high quality education, training and services to individuals, industry and the community.

The 1995-8 strategic plan outlines a commitment to a number of key actions, in particular:

Windle Pilkington Building

- work in partnership with Qualitec (now the Chamber), employers, the local authority and higher education
- investment in buildings and equipment as a major priority
- contribution to the economic regeneration of St Helens

At the time of incorporation, the survey undertaken on behalf of the Funding Council resulted in the allocation of £13.6m of Hunter funding. By harnessing Hunter money with other sources of funding, the college has been able to enhance significantly the quality of its buildings stock to meet the requirements of planned growth within the FEFC's utilisation and space targets, whilst also meeting the requirements of modern curriculum delivery. This has freed up space for workshop delivery for technology, maths, English and learning workshops. It has created space for realistic working environments, enabling students to experience work and to develop and demonstrate competence to employment standards.

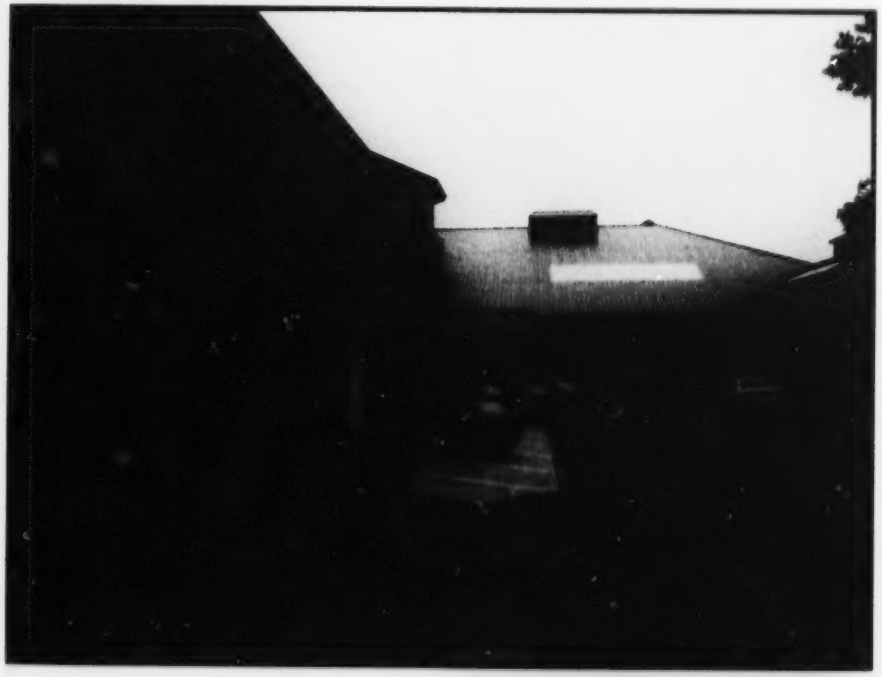
The most recent innovation — and one of our most successful — has been the development of the Step Up leisure complex at Brook Street, which allows students to gain accreditation through the management of a leisure facility, unparalleled within the area. During its first month of operation it earned £5,000 income and has a membership of 300.

The Technology Centre

The 1995-8 strategic plan states the intention to develop the Technology Centre as a major regional centre.

The vision of the centre as a key component of a technology campus can be traced back to 1985 when members and officers of St Helens MBC visited West Germany and gained a first-hand insight into the benefits of such collaboration. This stimulated discussion on their return as to how a partnership approach could foster the economic regeneration of the borough.

The Technology Centre was to bring together in new, purpose-built accommodation business advice, technology training and education, access to the latest technologies and business start up units. A partnership of the college and the local authority sought funding for the project from local and central government and from Europe. Even before St Helens gained objective one status as part of Merseyside, the borough had received significant European funding. While that status is sometimes regarded enviously by other parts of the country, what people sometimes forget are the economic indicators of poverty that qualify the borough for European monies:



- high unemployment
- a high percentage of single parents
- high levels of ill health
- a declining industrial base

The Technology Centre exists to multi-skill the workforce, encourage entrepeneurship, develop new skills to meet the identified skills gaps and provide access to professional advice, including sources of funding.

Since the college's Centre is to cost a projected £20m, the project has been developed in phases. Phase one opened in 1993, making available accommodation for construction studies.

It is also meant to provide space for general classrooms, laboratories, library and learning workshops, social areas, staff rooms and offices, together with extensive workshop facilities for the whole range of construction crafts and related professional studies. Outstanding features include a project area large enough to bring all the skills together: for example to enable students to build the side of a house and to simulate, as far as health and safety regulations allow, realistic on-site conditions without being open to the elements and the disruption that the British weather can bring to construction sites. The college's inspection report described the facility as probably one of the best in the region — if not the country.

In the summer of 1995, road transport studies together with engineering technology moved into the next completed phase. Innovations included work areas in which theory and practice function alongside one another, so that students have not only direct practical experience but also the underpinning knowledge. A consortium of St Helens engineering companies suggested some years ago that, as welcome as the move towards assessing competence might be, the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

new National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) would be of little value unless students understood the theory behind the practice. St Helens engineering students have consequently followed enhanced NVQ programmes, thus anticipating the conclusions of a recent NVQ survey.

The final phase of the centre will provide much needed extra classrooms and improve access round the site. Planning for the centre took account of the needs of those with physical disabilities in line with the college's commitment to equality of opportunity; a commitment which will help the college to meet the requirements of recent disability legislation. By creating link corridors the final phase will also reduce the considerable distances currently walked by staff and students.

Besides the college, the other campus occupants are:

- Business Link
- the TEC, newly merged with the Chamber of Commerce
- the Education-Business partnership
- a number of business units and conference facilities

Provision at the Technology Centre is diverse: craft skills, Asset (St Helens Youth Credits), return-to-work programmes, degree-level work (including a master's degree in Engineering run in conjunction with Lancaster University). New services include a pilot project in providing new small businesses with access to machinery currently beyond their purchasing power.

SmithKline Beecham Project

SmithKline Beecham's decision in 1994 to close its manufacturing site in St Helens was a devastating blow for the town. The long association with the Beecham family was to end. Over a number of years the workforce had been reduced, so the closure meant the loss of some 400 jobs. Such has been the loss of employment in the borough that even before closure the college was the fourth largest employer — after the local authority, the health authority and Pilkingtons.

The immediate response to the closure was a deputation from the authority to attempt to persuade SmithKline Beecham to reconsider its decision. As well as the desperation over job losses, there was also concern about potential problems likely to arise from a redundant factory in the town centre. The site itself consisted of a listed building, well constructed units and car parking. It faces on to the Brook Street campus of St Helens College and is very visible to those arriving into the town along the new motorway link road. The listed building includes a handsome clock tower, which is a significant landmark within the town. Indeed company managers told us later that should the clock be a few minutes slow, their switchboard was jammed by local townspeople helpfully bringing it to their attention.

Perhaps it was always a forlorn hope, but the decision to close was not reversed and the company began the painful process of ripping out the machinery to be utilised elsewhere and working its way through its redundancy programme. One of the distinctive characteristics of St Helens is a loyal, skilled workforce with good industrial relations. The next decision related to the site.

St Helens, praised by Michael Heseltine for its effective public-private sector partnerships, had already been modernised. Two new supermarkets had opened together with a new hotel. The shopping centre had been pedestrianised with two indoor precincts. Most of the major retailers were already present in the town. Other derelict sites were available for development and across the road was an empty 1930s building which had been occupied by Pilkingtons, who were less than happy with the authority's decision to list it as a rare example of an architect whose work is more usually associated with cinemas of that period. With that scenario it was unlikely that the Beecham's site could be sold for development.

When the company decided to donate the site to the college, it reflected a desire by the Beecham family to make a contribution to the town in memory of its long association. Ironically, during the SB period there had been very little contact between the company and the borough. The only

SmithKline Beecham factory

pre-condition on the donation was that the Beecham name would be preserved. The most immediate tasks for the St Helens corporation were to assess the impact of the proposed donation on the estates strategy; find the funds to develop the site; and seek FEFC approval. For the project to succeed, timing was critical.

In describing the subsequent series of events it is easy to underestimate how critical each stage was to turning the vision into reality. Ultimately, without sufficient funding to develop it, the building would be of little value. When the offer was made, college management were in the process of transferring the school of art, media and design from the Gamble Building to an empty school (Windle Pilkington building) adjoining the SmithKline Beecham factory. A complex move, it meant obtaining the approval of the trustees of the trust laid down by Sir David Gamble in 1896. The process of transfer title dated back to incorporation and was taking years, not months to resolve. In addition the FEFC's approval was sought to transfer the Hunter allocation from the Gamble to the Windle Pilkington building. This situation was further complicated by the SB offer, which meant in turn withdrawing from the Windle Pilkington plan even before work began.

Detailed project proposals were produced to secure both FEFC approval and external funding. The cost of developing the SB site were originally estimated at between £3m and £6m — depending upon the content and quality of the scheme. A case had to be made relating to projected growth in student numbers and units of activity, with reference to the total square meterage available across all three college sites. Discussion centred on the feasibility of demolishing parts of Brook Street to allow for the additional space created by SB. Ultimately, a compromise allowed for mothballing part of the site, instead of demolition. In addition the SB site would be opened up for occupation by other partners, with work complementary to that of the college, for example the careers service in which the college is a share holder, the voluntary services in St Helens, and St Helens Sound, a radio station which is being developed as a community resource and a training facility.

The other strand was to attract project funding and to that end project proposals were produced together with artists' impressions so that the technical panel in Merseyside could understand the components of the scheme. The vision took shape through the architect's drawings. The key elements of the development included:

- multi-use occupation of the listed building as office space
- adaptation of the factory units to incorporate the

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

school of art, media and design

- a newly established centre for professional studies in software and systems engineering
- a research and development wing to develop a transfer technology centre
- the 'Beecham' open learning and resource centre
- student refectory and social areas
- development of information technology to provide video conferencing, a cyber café, access to the Internet, multi-media and the heart of a community information technology network

At the same time development of the grounds would provide much needed car parking as well as an attractive landscaped environment to incorporate a heritage trail as a community resource.

When the college took over ownership of the site, it agreed to help redundant workers find new employment and to involve them in training schemes. Most have subsequently found work, some at the college. An effective working relationship evolved with the senior managers at SB and one could not help but feel their sense of loss. A few had spent upward of 30 years at that factory.

The project could not have been realised without the support of the local authority, the TEC, the FEFC and the Beecham family. So significant is the project to the development of the college as a whole that the college's corporate identity has been revised to incorporate the Beecham clock tower as the basis of the college's logo. Pedestrianisation of the road between SB and Brook Street will allow the development of the site as a single campus.

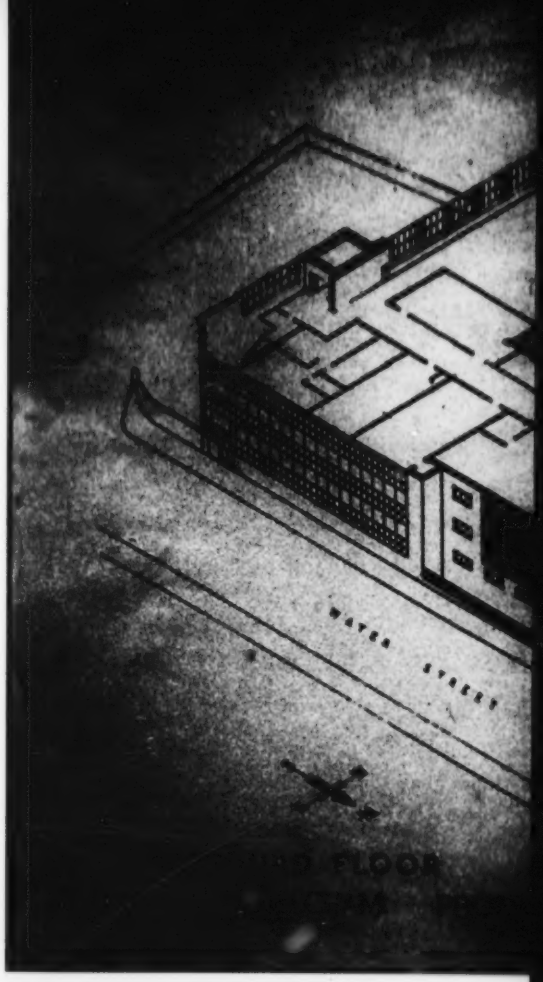
The funding for the project comes to just over £5 million:

- £1,733,000 European Regional Development Fund Objective 1
- £1,120,000 private sector contributions (including SB's generous donation of land and buildings)
- £949,000 single regeneration budget
- £1,027,000 Hunter allocation
- £200,000 college capital

Considerable project management skills have been needed to oversee this project at the same time that phase 2 of the Technology Centre was being built and the Newton-le-Willows campus was also subject to a major rebuild.

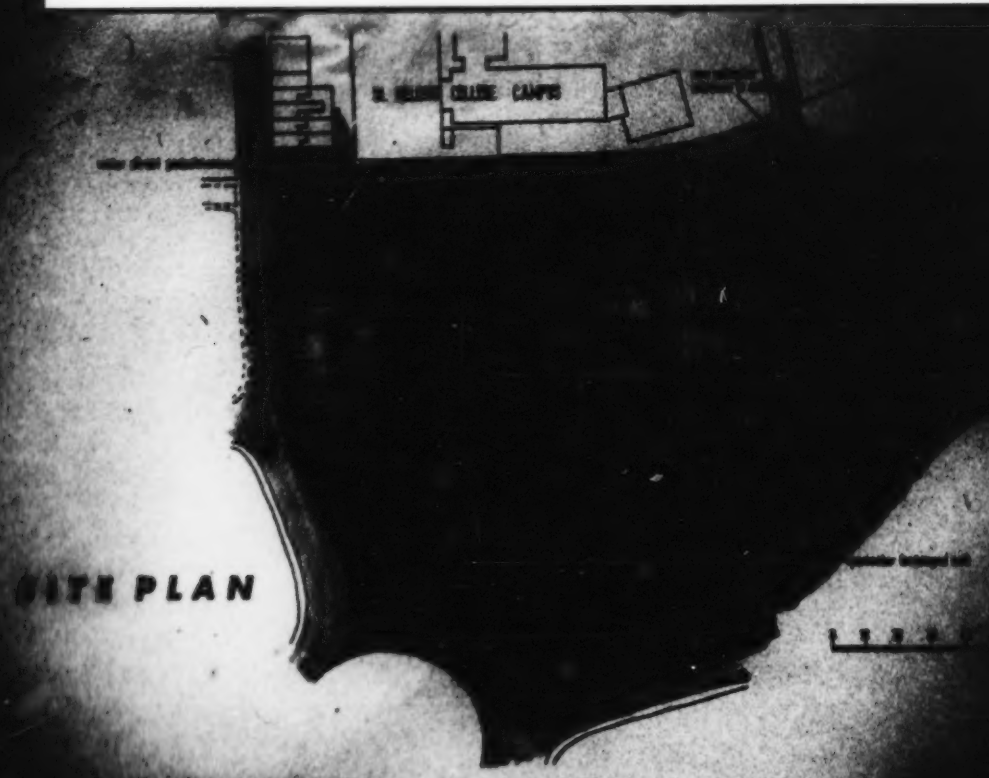
Partnership for success

St Helens is a tight knit community which realises that success is bred from effective partnerships. The college is dynamic and innovative and most of its major achievements have resulted from local partnerships. A successful Competitiveness Fund bid led to the development of environmental technology, which in turn has created a partnership with Phillips. This has been so effective that Phillips has already increased the value of the project since its inception in the summer of 1995. On a smaller scale, a contribution from North West Water towards an environmental garden at Newton-le-Willows has been added to by contributions from Norwest Holst and Wainwright and Gibson. As with the most innovative schemes, the



community benefits from a new resource, while college students benefit from enhanced resources. The new facilities at Newton-le-Willows were opened on Saturday 4 March 1996 by the Shadow Secretary for Education and Employment, David Blunkett.

Both the Technology Centre and the Beecham projects are sufficiently flexible to allow for significant change of use should the balance of provision, the profile of students or the delivery of the curriculum change substantially. Investment in the buildings will provide a high quality environment for the college and its community well into the 21st century.



Site plans of SB

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FEDA Further Education Development Agency

Innovations *in FE*

Issue 3, Autumn 1996

ISBN: 1 85338 432 1

Price: £9·50

© FEDA 1996

FEDA

Publications Department

Coombe Lodge, Blagdon, Bristol BS18 6RG

Tel: [01761] 462503 Fax: [01761] 463140

Printed by Century Litho, Cornwall